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This study is an analysis of the possible influence of the Portuguese epic, The Lusiad (1572) on the form, style and spirit of Herman Melville's American epic, Moby-Dick (1851). Chapter I indicates Melville's constant practice of borrowing from other literary works and his tendency to look to the elements of earlier classics to supplement his materials and style. The chapter also identifies Melville's narrative as an epic, illustrating his propensity toward the expansive classic form. Chapter II reveals evidence in Melville's novels and poems and evidence from biographers and critics that Melville knew Camoëns' Lusiad and felt admiration and respect for the epic work. The similarity of the epic form of both writers is the subject of the third chapter which demonstrates parallel fulfillment of the requisites of literary epic in both works and their likeness of manner and purpose. The concluding chapter assesses the affinity of spirit in Melville and Camoëns, takes note of textual influence of The Lusiad on Moby-Dick, and makes observations of the correspondence of their respective eras. The result is substantial evidence of a definite influence of the historical Portuguese epic on Melville's American sea story.

THE INFLUENCE OF CAMOËNS' LUSIAD ON MELVILLE'S MOBY-DICK

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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CHAPTER I

MELVILLE AND THE PROBLEM OF LITERARY DEBT

Herman Melville once wrote ". . . genius all over the world stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle around."[1] In these words, penned the summer of 1850 at the time he was writing Moby-Dick, Melville seems to assert that all knowledge and expressed experience of man is a mutual province and that creativity is the personalization of the legacy of human recognition. Melville's emulation and assimilation of works from various periods and movements in history provided a large part of the material to which he applied his own original genius. Melville's literary debt has not gone unnoticed, for, in source study and the study of literary influence, Melville scholars have reaped a harvest of observation, analysis and argument. Newton Arvin, in his critical biography, refers to Melville's "extraordinary dependence on the writings of other men,"[2] and he enumerates the factual accounts upon which Melville drew for Moby-Dick, such as those of J. Ross Browne, Thomas Beale and William Scoresby. Similarly, for his first literary attempts, as Van Wyck Brooks[3]

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[1] "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Major Writers of America, ed. Perry Miller (New York, 1966), p. 503.

[2] Herman Melville: A Critical Biography (New York, 1950), p. 144.

[3] The Times of Melville and Whitman, Makers and Finders Series, Vol. III (New York, 1947), p. 154.

points out, Melville drew freely from earlier travellers' accounts. Brooks claims too that Melville is indebted to Smollett for the narrative technique employed in White-Jacket. Regarding this man-of-war novel, Robert F. Lucid's tone in an American Literature article[4] seems somewhat indignant about Melville's lack of conscience in drawing so heavily from Richard Henry Dana's Two Years Before the Mast, for Lucid contends that several scenes in White-Jacket are obvious paraphrases of Dana. Regarding the sailor's fall from the yardarm, Willard Thorp claims "Melville coolly lifted from Nathaniel Ames' A Mariner's Sketches."[5]

Melville freely incorporates a major influence into the plot and structure of Pierre, for Pierre, like Melville, was an avid reader of Dante and made frequent mention of the Inferno as a literary work and as a representation of his own frame of mind at times. Nathalia Wright[6] discusses the structural likeness of Melville's work and that of Dante, pointing out that Melville's "levels of Hell," if not so named, are yet patterned after those of Dante. An earlier, if not so thorough, cognizance of the Dante influence was that of Giovanni in PMLA of March 1949.[7]

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[4]"The Influence of Two Years Before the Mast on Melville," American Literature, XXXI (1959), 243-256.

[5]"Herman Melville," Literary History of the United States, eds. Robert E. Spiller, et al (New York, 1953), p. 447.

[6]"Pierre: Herman Melville's Inferno," American Literature, XXXII (1960), 167-181.

[7]"Melville's Pierre and Dante's Inferno," PMLA, LXIV (March 1949), 70-78.

John H. Birss[8] reflects on the influence of William Blake, and R. W. B. Lewis[9] concerns himself with how closely Melville read the works of Homer rather than with specific Homeric influence. Several scholars contribute lengthy observations on the influence of Shakespeare on Herman Melville. Louis Untermeyer says simply that the "accent and eloquence of Shakespeare show in Melville's writing."[10] One of the most elaborate discussions of the Shakespearean influence is that of F. O. Matthiessen who details Melville's emulation of the Elizabethan poet and dramatist in Moby-Dick and Pierre. Matthiessen's conviction is indicated in the title of his discussion of Pierre, "American Hamlet."[11]

On the fact of Melville's "extraordinary dependence" most critics seem to agree. The point of divergence apparently arises in the question of its propriety according to the criterion of literary decorum, of its effect on his literary worthiness and of his innocence or guilt of moral transgression against his predecessors from whom he drew and against the readers whom he addressed. Matthiessen rises to the defense of Melville's alleged lack of originality in declaring that

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8"Herman Melville and Blake," Notes and Queries, CLXVI (May 1934), p. 311.

9"Melville on Homer," American Literature, XXII (May, 1950), 166-177.

10Makers of the Modern World (New York, 1955), p. 54.

11American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York, 1941), p. 468.

Melville has demonstrated "that there should be no artificial separation between the life of the mind and of the body, that reading, to a quickened imagination, could be as much a part of assimilated experience as adventures."[12] That Melville's vast reading and his assimilation of facts, techniques, and forms into his own works simply put him in the mainstream of human life and the progress of man's intellectual expression, seems to be the point of Henry A. Murray who states, "to this Columbus of the mind, the great archetypal figures of myth, drama and epic were not pieces of intellectual Dresden china, heirlooms of a classical education, ornamental bric-a-brac to be put here and there for the pleasure of genteel readers."[13] These experiences were real to Melville, and through them his mind knew exercise and discipline which became vital to his own creativity in a way that the physical venture could not have accomplished. Through Melville's reactions to these encounters, Murray continues, "we are offered a spectacle of spiritual development through passionate identifications."[14]

Newton Arvin believes that Melville's treatment of literary and factual sources is suggestive of "something very potently archaic in his genius,"[15] and he terms the American writer "an essentially

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[12]Matthiessen, p. 395.

[13]"In Nomine Diaboli," Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Richard Chase (New Jersey, Englewood Cliffs, 1962), p. 65.

[14]Murray, p. 65.

[15]Arvin, p. 144.

convertive or transmutative poet."[16] Melville's very philosophic stance seems to have been determined by the precedent of human history. Tom's sojourn into the Typee Valley is suggestive of man's return to his origins in the Garden of Eden and seems to represent Melville's longing for man's awareness of his beginnings, of his essential creation. To know the advancing path of civilization, the progression of man's ideas and the development of his expression was, to Herman Melville, to better know himself and his time. Melville, like Ishmael, had an "everlasting itch for things remote"[17] in time and place. Stanley Geist testifies to Melville's kinship to an earlier spirit and age: "Melville was left to consort with the ghosts of men who had died hundreds of years before--they alone affording him that sense of spiritual affinity which he sought vainly in the universe of the living."[18] His spiritual affinity with the ancients and his reliance on his predecessors seem to grant him a place among writers of epic whose vision extended through the ages to view past history, real or legendary, and gave it the expression of their own originality and their times. Melville's creative spirit is like the epic creators

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[16]Arvin, p. 144.

[17]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Luther S. Mansield and Howard P. Vincent (New York, 1951), p. 6. (All subsequent references to the text of Moby-Dick will be to this edition, and page numbers will be parenthesized in my text.)

[18]Herman Melville: The Tragic Vision and the Heroic Ideal (Cambridge, 1939), p. 64.

who believed, as Ian Watt phrases it, that "since Nature is essentially complete and unchanging, its records, whether scriptural, legendary or historical, constitute a definite repertoire of human experience."[19] Melville's archaic propensities led him to the same natural reservoir which the classics drew upon for man's essential streams of literature.[20] Thus Melville's dependence, his archaic genius and his transmutative power provide the area of concern in this study which proposes to offer textual and external evidence of Melville's knowledge of the Portuguese national epic, The Lusiad by Luis de Camoëns, and its influence on the form and language of Moby-Dick.

Moby-Dick is widely considered an epic in American literature. The classification of a common genre yields a denominator for comparative analysis of Camoëns' Lusiad and Melville's sea story. Alfred Kazin describes heroic types in the novel and declares that Melville as a writer was "called to a heroic new destiny."[21] He sees the novel as a poetic narrative and an epic, "a long poem on an heroic theme."[22] In his discussion of the poetic quality of the novel, Richard Chase asserts that ". . . an epic emerges,"[23] and Arvin refers

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[19]The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley, California, 1967), p. 14.

[20]The concept of originality at issue here is the classic one in which the term refers to the record of original, primal human experience. (Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, p. 13.)

[21]"Introduction," Moby Dick by Herman Melville (Boston, 1956), p. vi.

[22]Ibid., p. v.

[23]The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York, 1957), p. 97.

to it as "epic-like."[24] Russell Blankenship believes that Moby-Dick is best read "as a symphony or huge epic of the sea."[25] Archibald MacMechan claims the book "at once the epic and encyclopedia of whaling."[26] In his impressionistic interpretation of Moby-Dick, Lewis Mumford rates it as "the best tragic epic of modern times and one of the fine poetic works of all time."[27] William Targ characterizes the novel as, "a suspense story of epic magnitude, profound, and tragic in the Greek sense,"[28] and Howard P. Vincent terms it a "whaling epic."[29] Untermeyer concludes his analysis of Moby-Dick: ". . . no one has questioned the epic quality of the work. It stands in superb isolation, a literary monolith."[30]

To say that the two works are both epics is to rely on a vast category. To specify more clearly, C. M. Bowra's discussion[31] of two kinds of epic indicates that Camoëns' work and that of Melville were

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[24]Arvin, p. 155.

[25]American Literature as an Expression of the National Mind (New York, 1949), p. 386.

[26]"The Best Sea Story Ever Written," Queen's Quarterly, XVII (October, 1899), 120-30.

[27]Herman Melville: His Life and Vision (New York, 1962), p. 131.

[28]Bouillabaise for Bibliophiles (New York, 1955), p. 301.

[29]The Trying-Out of Moby Dick (Evanston, Illinois, 1949), p. 7.

[30]Untermeyer, p. 54

[31]"Some Characteristics of Literary Epic," From Virgil to Milton (London, 1948), p. 1.

written subsequent to a significant turning point in the development of the epic. Virgil is the figure of transition and the historical basis upon which Bowra distinguishes between the authentic epic and the literary epic. By authentic epic he means those which were created for oral presentation and in a heroic world in which the ideal was a figure of grand strength and courage, achieving honor and fame in his brave action even if it meant death. The Iliad, The Odyssey, Beowulf and Song of Roland are such narratives. The literary epic, different in its origin and concept of human worth, is represented by The Aeneid, The Lusiad, and Paradise Lost. It characterizes man increasingly aware of his place in the order of life--aware of his relationship with man and with God. Virgil set the precedent when he dramatized a philosophy of life and death in the social order rather than of an archaic and isolated individual. The epic hero which emerges is a man involved and inspired by the interaction of the human mind and experience. Camoëns was eager also to immortalize the heroic men, the great issues and powerful experiences of his own time. Portugal was his subject, Vasco da Gama his representative, mythology his background and the epic his mode. Virgil and Camoëns had taken the path of human and literary progress to a more symbolic and representative pattern. They had moved up the ladder of generalization to a more abstract and profound level of interpretation, for their heroes were not only individuals but each was an embodiment of a people and of humanity. Unlike their predecessors of the authentic epic, their literary form was imbued with a moral meaning, and, in the words of Bowra, "their

heroes are examples of what men ought to be or types of human destiny whose very mistakes must be marked and remembered."[32]

Captain Ahab is a type of human destiny whose evil obsession and demonic drive are marked and remembered. Melville's novel, or epic, is an extended metaphor of his comment on man's depravity in the social order, and his character represents the potential evil in every man. The American writer chose the adventure and glory of whaling as his epic framework in a period when the "heroic exploits of fishing were passing into myth."[33] Melville had a rich literary heritage "going back to classical times"[34] on which to draw, and his "Leviathan, most powerful and mysterious of God's creatures had for centuries engaged the imagination of writers,"[35] as Willard Thorp records it. Thus, in Moby-Dick, Melville reflects nineteenth century America, colored by his passion for the archaic, and his use of the epic mode in the manner of Camoëns calls for a close comparison of his major work with that of the Renaissance Portuguese epic and an investigation of its influence on the form and substance of Moby-Dick.

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[32]Bowra, p. 16.

[33]Thorp, p. 453.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

CHAPTER II

MELVILLE'S KNOWLEDGE OF CAMOËNS

Portugal's Luis de Camoëns, "maker of the only truly modern epic,"[1] published in 1572 what became a national literary monument to his countrymen. As a distant relative of the explorer Vasco da Gama (who died in the year of Camoëns' birth, 1524) and as an enthusiastic patriot of Portugal, the poet planned to climax his career of writing poetry with a classic epic--the story of da Gama's voyage to explore a sea route to the Indies. His own life provided a bountiful reservoir of direct and indirect sources to enrich his poetic narrative. Born into a distinguished Lisbon family, he had enjoyed the advantage of classical studies and had learned Latin, Spanish and Italian, acquiring through Latin an "encyclopedic knowledge of both Greek and Roman mythology,"[2] as well as having read widely in Ovid, Lucan, Cicero, Horace and Vergil.[3] A lively and willful personality, the young Portuguese was exiled from Lisbon by the King. The poet's impassioned verses for a favorite lady of the Queen created antagonism in the court, but the final blow to his flourishing

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[1]George Edward Woodberry, "Camoëns," Inspiration of Poetry (New York, 1911), p. 58.

[2]Henry H. Hart, Luis de Camoëns and the Epic of the Lusiads (Norman, Oklahoma, 1962), p. 15.

[3]Ibid.

career was by his own hand. Commissioned to write a drama for a wedding celebration for which the King and Queen were to be in attendance, the young writer indiscreetly chose his plot from a historical tale of a Syrian King which too closely paralleled an ignoble affair in the royal family and was, consequently, highly offensive. Hart says of Camoëns' plight: "As the curtain fell on the last lines of King Seleucus, so it was lowered on the youth, prospects, and joy of living for Luis de Camoëns."[4] The condemnation required him to give up the life of courts and cities and to sail half-way around the world to India as a soldier for a term of three years. The subsequent events of his life--war, imprisonment, shipwreck, and illness--prevented his return and kept him in foreign lands and waters for nearly twenty years. In 1570 he stepped again on Portuguese soil with the years of hardship, disillusionment and degradation reflected in the story of the epic manuscript he carried.

These facets of Camoëns' life clarify the three main elements of The Lusiad. First, the background structure, or plot from classical mythology, provides the framework of the narrative. Such an employment is both characteristic of Renaissance literary convention and reflective of Camoëns' classical training. He called upon the archaic mythological powers to lend dignity and a sense of classic tradition to his account of a more nearly contemporary event. Camoëns, like Melville, had "wandered through those vast catacombs of buried

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[4]Hart, p. 55.

genius"[5] and recognized the treasures of the ages. Second, The Lusiad records the history of Portugal from its origins to the time of writing. Because the main event, da Gama's voyage, is in time between earliest Portugal and the age of Camoëns, he employs the gods as a means of relating past history and prophesying the future, for Jupiter foretells the great deeds of the Portuguese[6] and, guided to the land of Melinde by Mercury, da Gama tells the king the past history of his country (II, 81-83). Portuguese history, then, grants the time perspective and main episodes of the epic and is suggested by the title, Os Lusiadas, which means "Sons of Lusus" referring to the Portuguese who were believed to be descended from Lusus, the hero of Lusitania.[7] Finally, the central unity is afforded by the fortunes of da Gama in search of a sea route which would enable his country to profit from the growing commerce of the world. Camoëns drew heavily on his own sea experience in the account of da Gama's adventures, imparting naturalness and vigor to The Lusiad. Thus, mythology, history and exploration provided the substance with which Camoëns infused his art. His power of poetic genius, his feeling of human rejection and his sense of national pride are main constituents of the sixteenth-century epic

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[5]Lord Viscount Strangford, Poems from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoëns with Remarks on His Life and Writings (London, 1810), p. 26.

[6]Luis de Camoëns, The Lusiad, trans. William Julius Mickle (Dublin, 1791), pp. 61-65. (All subsequent references to the text of The Lusiad will be to this edition; book number and page number will be parenthesized in my text.)

[7]Bowra, p. 90.

universally popular in his native land today. The most recent Camoëns biographer declares, "What Homer was to the Greeks and Vergil's Aeneid to the Romans of Augustus' day, so even now is The Lusiad of Camoëns to the Portuguese: the incomparable literary monument to their early leaders and their glorious exploits."[8]

Herman Melville came to know Camoëns' poetry through John J. Chase, the one man of his Pacific voyages for whom he expressed unqualified admiration. Chase, an Englishman by birth, had served in the British navy prior to joining the U. S. naval service, which he deserted for a time to serve Peru during her war with Bolivia in 1840, but was later pardoned and reinstated into the U. S. Navy.[9] Evidently, in addition to his being a scholar and a knowledgeable man in the field of literature, he was a personable gentleman, for he was well liked by the crew and was portrayed in Melville's later writings as a "frank and charming man."[10] In White-Jacket the novelist-sailor draws vividly the character of Jack Chase, and here too he becomes acquainted with Luis de Camoëns, for he says of the main-top captain:

> Jack had read all the verses of Byron, and all the romances of Scott. He talked of Rob Roy, Don Juan, and Pelham: Macbeth and Ulysses; but above all things, was an ardent admirer of Camoëns. Parts of The Lusiad he could recite in the original.[11]

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[8]Hart, p. 22.

[9]Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 74-75.

[10]Herman Melville, White-Jacket, ed. Hennig Cohen (New York, 1967), p. 10.

[11]Melville, White-Jacket, p. 11.

Not only character but also setting were important in Melville-White-Jacket's introduction to Camoëns. During a misty, cloudy night in the maintop, Jack Chase feels the fitness of wild setting and wild poetry:

> "But how we boom through the billows!" cried Jack, gazing over the top-rail; then, flinging forth his arm, recited, "'Aslope, and gliding on the leeward side,/The bounding vessel cuts the roaring tide."
>
> Camoëns! White-Jacket, Camoëns! Did you ever read him? The Lusiad, I mean? It's the man-of-war epic of the world, my lad. Give me Gama for a commodore, say I--Noble Gama! And Mickle White-Jacket, did you ever read of him? William Julius Mickle? Camoëns's translator? [12] A disappointed man though, White-Jacket. Besides his version of The Lusiad, he wrote many forgotten things. Did you ever see his ballad of Cumnor Hall?--No?--Why, it gave Sir Walter Scott the hint of Kenilworth. My father knew Mickle when he went to sea on board the old Romney man-of-war. How many great men have been sailors, White-Jacket! They say Homer himself was once a tar, even as his hero, Ulysses, was both a sailor and a shipwright. I'll swear Shakespeare was once a captain of the forecastle. Do you mind the first scene in The Tempest, White-Jacket? And the world-finder, Christopher Columbus, was a sailor! and so was Camoëns, who went to sea with Gama, [13] else we had never had the Lusiad, White-Jacket. Yes, I've sailed over the very track that Camoëns sailed--round the East Cape into the Indian Ocean. I've been in Don Jose's garden, too, in Macao, and

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[12] From Melville's extensive reference to Mickle, it is generally assumed that this is the English translation of The Lusiad which he knew. E. M. W. Tillyard endorses Mickle's work as the most faithful to the original of all English translations. (The English Epic and Its Background, p. 240).

[13] The statement that Camoëns sailed with da Gama causes a time discrepancy since biographical data indicates that Camoëns was born in the year of da Gama's death. The misconception may have been Jack Chase's or Melville's; a third possibility is that it is a figure of speech to suggest that figuratively or imaginatively Camoëns sailed with da Gama.

> bathed my feet in the blessed dew of the walks where Camoëns wandered before me. Yes, White-Jacket, and I have seen and sat in the cave at the end of the flowery, winding way where Camoëns, according to tradition, composed certain parts of his Lusiad. Ay, Camoëns was a sailor once![14]

The final chapter of the novel ends as the ship is homeward bound, and Jack Chase quotes Camoëns again crying:

> "For the last time, hear Camoëns, boys!"
>
> How calm the waves, how mild the balmy gale!
> The Halcyons call, yes Lusians spread the sail!
> Appeased, old Ocean now shall rage no more;
> Haste, point our bowsprit for yon shadowy shore.
> Soon shall the transports of your natal soil
> O'erwhelm in bounding joy the thoughts of every toil.[15]

In Billy Budd, which he dedicated to Jack Chase, we find another direct reference in which Melville, elaborating upon naval enlistment irregularities, alludes to a time in the past of which he says:

> That era appears measurably clear to us who look back at it, and but read of it. But to the grandfathers of us graybeards, the more thoughtful of them, the genius of it presented an aspect like that of Camoëns' Spirit of the Cape an eclipsing menace mysterious and prodigious.[16]

During his later life Melville wrote two short companion poems on Camoëns which were unpublished at his death and in which, according to Newton Arvin, "he clearly identified himself, in his obscurity and solitude, with his great Portuguese predecessor."[17] In the first,

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[14]Melville, White-Jacket, pp. 269-70.

[15]Ibid., pp. 397-98.

[16]Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative) eds. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago, 1962), p. 66.

[17]Arvin, p. 150.

"Camoëns," Melville injects a parenthetical title "Before," and the second poem bears the contrasting "After." In the first poem Melville comments on the artist's constant and anxious struggle to capture and express the beauties and truths he perceives.

CAMOËNS.

1

(Before)

Ever restless, restless, craving rest--
The Imperfect toward Perfection pressed!
Yea, for the God demands thy best.
The world with endless beauty teems,
And thought evokes new worlds of dreams:
Hunt then the flying herds of themes!
And fan, yet fan thy fervid fire,
Until the crucibled gold shall glow.
In ordered ardor, nobly strong,
Flame to the height of epic song.[18]

In Melville's mind, he and Camoëns shared a profound commitment to their art. Their works were both a means and an end--a means of sharing with mankind the creative rumblings in their souls and an end in artistic expression for man's aesthetic savoring. The poetic soul within each of them urged them on--"the Imperfect toward Perfection." The "Before" and "After" notations apparently refer to two points in their respective literary and poetic labors.

The second poem, "Camoëns in the Hospital" represents the artistic and ambitious temperament soured on all the world.

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[18]Herman Melville, Selected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Hennig Cohen (Carbondale, Illinois, 1964), p. 168.

Camoëns in the Hospital

2

(After)

What now avails the pageant verse,
Trophies and arms with music borne?
Base is the world; and some rehearse
How noblest meet ignoble scorn.
Vain now the ardor, vain the fire,
Delirium mere, unsound desire:
Fate's knife hath ripped thy chorded lyre.
Exhausted by the exacting lay,
Thou dost but fall a surer prey
To wile and guile ill understood;
While they who work them, fair in face,
Still keep their strength in prudent place,
And claim they worthier run life's race,
Serving high God with useful good.[19]

Mickle's translation of The Lusiad includes an extensive biographical account of the poet, and it is perhaps his report of Camoëns' dying in an almshouse which led Melville to use the term "hospital." The Portuguese poet died in extreme poverty, half-blind and neglected by the country he had so gloriously praised. Henry Hart believes the outcast poet died in a bare and dirty tenement, but it is agreed that he died without so much as a sheet or shroud to cover him.[20] Following the publication of the small first edition of The Lusiad, the epic gained rather wide acclaim, and the King, learning of Camoens' pitiable plight, granted the poet the none-too-generous pension of

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[19]Herman Melville, Poems, p. 168.

[20]Hart, pp. 212-13.

15,000 reis or 150 dollars annually.[21] Hardly enough to even sustain him, the meager sum was difficult to collect due to the inefficiency and apathy of government officials. An additional, if not so tangible blow, befell Camoëns when the King announced he was taking a poet to observe and record in verse the military campaign in Africa. The chosen poet was not Camoëns. His degradation was complete, and, in the words of Hart, "the man who had devoted his life to his country . . . was forgotten and denied even this recognition of his genius and worth."[22] The bitterness and dejection he must have felt is expressed in Melville's second Camoëns poem.

Melville writes these poems in the heroic couplet of Mickle's translation of The Lusiad except that he replaces Mickle's iambic pentameter with iambic tetrameter. Melville may have thought it fitting to express his own feelings about the poet in the same form in which he came to know him.

No exact date is given the two poems, but it may have been shortly after the spring of 1867 when Melville marked three lines in one of Camoëns' sonnets:

> My senses lost, misjudging men declare,
> And Reason banish'd from her mental throne,
> Because I shun the crowd, and dwell alone.[23]

Melville, too, had been underrated by his contemporaries, and virtually none of his works had been received with unqualified popular approval.

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[21]Hart, p. 195.

[22]Ibid., p. 205.

[23]Howard, p. 284.

He adapted a stoic facade, but he assuredly felt the rejection poignantly. Carl Van Doren quotes Melville, "Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter."[24] His dormant cynicism and resentment smoldered in his long poem Clarel (1876) and is evident in such passages as:

> But through such strange illusions have they passed
> Who in life's pilgrimage have baffled striven--
> Even death may prove unreal at the last,
> And stoics be astounded into heaven.
>
> Sorrow--but fondled;
> Reproaches that never upbraid
> Spite the passion, the yearning
> Of love unrepaid.[25]

"His skepticism became . . .", as Leon Howard expresses it, "the dominant quality of his mind."[26]

The Lusiad more than once foretells the poet's doom and again and again expresses his own embittered fervor:

> Chill'd by my nation's cold neglect, the fires
> Glow bold no more, and all thy rage expires. (X,504)
>
> The king or hero to the Muse unjust
> Sinks as the nameless slave, extinct in dust. (X,505)
>
> forlorn he lies
> Low on an almshouse bed, and friendless dies. (X,435)
>
> Low in the dust the hero's glory ends:
> And in the desert sands his bones shall lie (X,438-9)

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[24]"Herman Melville," The American Novel 1789-1939 (New York, 1940), p. 97.

[25]Herman Melville, Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in The Holy Land (New York, 1963), Vol. II, p. 298.

[26]Howard, p. 308.

Howard suggests in his discussion of Melville's late poetic phase that he was executing a reversal in that throughout his life he had read and accumulated thoughts and ideas which were compatible with his own and that in his "retrospective old age" he reversed the process and attributed to other writers the philosophy and emotions which were his own.[27] The sentiments expressed in the two Camoëns poems furnish a further tie between the American and Portuguese poets. Theirs was a common destiny--a "fate subdued."

The text of Moby-Dick affords no direct mention of the poet himself, but editors Luther S. Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent point out seven instances of direct correlation between the story of Ahab and that of da Gama[28] which will be detailed in a later chapter. In addition to Mansfield and Vincent's indication of Camoën influence, Melville's biographer Leon Howard further elucidates the possibility of Camoëns' influence on the nineteenth-century American. Howard characterizes Jack Chase as a "master of language who could recite long passages from Camoëns' sailors' epic, The Lusiad, in the original Portuguese."[29] Howard further says of Chase, "he also probably contributed a great deal to Melville's growing interest in literature, for in the free and easy companionship of six hours a day for fourteen months the two had time to dwell reflectively upon almost everything

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[27]Howard, p. 334.

[28]Luther S. Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent, "Explanatory Notes," Moby-Dick, by Herman Melville (New York, 1951), p. 842.

[29]Howard, p. 74.

either had read."[30] At least three additional critics have taken note of Melville's knowledge of Camoëns and the subsequent influence on his work. Richard Chase refers to Camoëns as "an author of whom Melville was fond,"[31] and Van Wyck Brooks comments that Melville quoted Virgil, The Lusiad and Hudibras and observes that "it was one of Jack Chase's charms for him [Melville] that he too knew The Lusiad . . ."[32] The most extensive recognition, however, is that of Newton Arvin who says of Melville, ". . . certainly he knew The Lusiads and knew it well, in the surprisingly energetic version that Mickle had made in heroic couplets. It was, as he had found, the greatest of all modern poems about the sea. . ."[33]

Testimony from Melville's own texts demonstrates the American writer's encounter, knowledge and identification with the sixteenth-century Portuguese epic poet. It is, however, the indirect evidence found in their common style, form and spirit which signifies the extent to which Melville drew from Camoëns.

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[30]Howard, p. 74.

[31]Chase, p. 96.

[32]Brooks, pp. 153-54.

[33]Arvin, p. 144.

CHAPTER III

COMMON EPIC QUALITIES IN MOBY-DICK AND THE LUSIAD

Moby-Dick and The Lusiad may be compared on the basis of their common characteristics in the expansive epic genre. The two works reveal basic similarities with the form, style and spirit of works generally identified as epics.

Literary critics point out qualities inherent in the epic form but seldom attempt all-inclusive and final definition of it as a genre. Helene A. Guerber notes, "There are about as many definitions of an epic and rules for its composition as there are nations and epics."[1] For present purposes, three descriptive formulas of the literary epic shed light on the epics in question and illumine their common essential properties.

W. F. Thrall, Addison Hibbard and C. Hugh Holman, editors of A Handbook to Literature view the epic as:

> a long narrative poem in elevated style presenting characters of high position in a series of adventures which form an organic whole through their relation to a central figure of heroic proportions and through their development of episodes important to the history of a nation or race.[2]

Twentieth century readers tend to accept Melville's account of

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[1] The Book of the Epic (New York, 1966), p. 5.

[2] A Handbook to Literature (New York, 1960), pp. 174-75.

the great white whale as a novel, partly because it is a story and because the novel is the form in vogue. Critical evaluations of Melville's work as an epic are usually indicative of the work's greatness, its mark of achievement, and its scope, rather than indicative that it might genuinely be considered an epic, and to apply the descriptive "poem" to Moby-Dick would be, to many, straining the limits of literary definition. Padraic Colum, however, commented in the first quarter of the century, "It is a mistake, I think, in the criticism of Melville's works, to approach Moby-Dick as a novel . . . If Herman Melville had consciously proposed to himself to make the epic of man's invasion of the Oceans, his theme and his handling of it could hardly, it seems to me, be different."[3] To point out Melville's poetic qualities, or elevated style necessary to the epic, Colum notes that, "the prose loosens into extraordinary rhythms."[4] Melville's prose exceeds the prose of mere narrative, and occasionally it is even conventionally epical; the Tahitan sailor, for example, speaks in the manner of MacPherson's Ossian:

> Hail, holy nakedness of our dancing girls!
> The Heeva-Heeva! Ah! low veiled, high
> palmed Tahiti! I still rest me on thy mat,
> but the soft soil has slid! I saw thee
> woven in the wood, my mat! green the first
> day I brought ye thence; now worn and wilted
> quite. Ah me!--not thou nor I can bear the
> change! How then, if so be transplanted to
> yon sky? Hear I the roaring streams from
> Pirohitee's peak of spears, when they leap

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[3]"Moby Dick as an Epic: A Note," The Measure, XIII (March 1922), 16-17.

[4]Ibid., p. 17.

down the crags and drown the villages? The
blast! The blast! Up, spine, and meet it! (172)

Emotional exaltation surges through the converted-noun adjectives (high palmed Tahiti), the inverted syntax (I still rest me. . .), the alliteration (soft soil has slid. . .) and the personification (streams . . . leap) of the lines.

Gazing at the doubloon nailed to the mast as a reward for him who first catches sight of the white whale, Starbuck murmurs, "No fairy fingers can have pressed the gold, but devil's claws must have left their mouldings there since yesterday" (428). Colum rewrites the line as evidence that the rhythmic speech of Melville often rises to become at times regular blank verse:

No fairy fingers can have pressed this gold
But devil's claws must have left their mouldings there
Since yesterday.

More frequently than we find passages of distinctly metrical rhythm in Moby-Dick, we find examples of polyphonic prose which, according to Amy Lowell, is not really prose at all, but verse. She describes it as "many-voiced--and the form is so called because it makes use of all the 'voices' of poetry, namely: metre, vers libre, assonance, alliteration, rhyme, and return."[5] Such an example of Melville's polyphonic prose is found in his description of a whale trying desperately to avoid the fatal harpoon:

It was a terrific, most pitiable, and maddening sight.

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[5]Quoted in A Handbook to Literature, p. 372.

> The whale was now going head out, and sending his spout before him in a continual tormented jet; while his one poor fin beat his side in an agony of fright. Now to this hand, now to that, he yawned in faltering flight, and still at every billow that he broke, he spasmodically sank in the sea, or sideways rolled toward the sky his one beating fin. (352)

The evident rhyme of sight, fright, and flight is perhaps the most distinct poetic "voice" we hear in the lines with the instances of alliteration in the resounding f and s lending a smoothness which tightens the flow of the words.

Earlier, Captain Ahab issues an order to the emptied head of the whale--"speak, thou vast and venerable head" (309)--and his address has the ring of the polyphonic although in this case the assonance is dominant, with instances of alliteration.

> That head upon which the upper sun now gleams, has moved amid this world's foundations. Where unrecorded names and navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot; where in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the drowned; there, in that awful water-land, there was thy most familiar home. Thou has been where bell or diver never went; hast slept by many a sailor's side, where sleepless mothers would give their lives to lay them down. (310) (italics mine)

Later, Melville draws the somewhat incongruous scene of a whale skeleton transported to a glen of palms where the vegetation has grown in and around the bony frame to form a bower. He describes the bower in a passage without rhymes but having the tones of polyphonic prose or verse:

> It was a wondrous sight. The wood was green as mosses of the Icy Glen; the trees stood high and haughty, feeling their living sap; the industrious earth beneath was as a weaver's loom, with a gorgeous carpet on it, whereof the

> ground-vine tendrils formed the warp and woof, and the living flowers the figures. All the trees, with all their laden branches; all the shrubs and ferns, and grasses; the message-carrying air; all these unceasingly were active. Through the lacings of the leaves, the great sun seemed a flying shuttle weaving the unwearied verdure. Oh, busy weaver! Unseen weaver!--pause!--one word!--whither flows the fabric? What palace may it deck? Wherefore all these ceaseless toilings? Speak, weaver!--stay thy hand! but one single word with thee! Nay--the shuttle flies--the figures float from forth the loom; the freshet-rushing carpet forever slides away. (446-47)

The poetically effective sound patterns seem, in this instance, regulated by the punctuation which allows for an intermittent rhythm juxtaposed with the descriptive word units. For example, in the sentence "All the trees. . ," the comma after trees provides a brief pause to allow the descriptive phrase to be linked to the modified object in the mind of the reader. The semi-colon gives a more distinct pause, and the listing effect and the break set up a rhythmical pattern between "branches" and "grasses." After the descriptive listing, another semi-colon separates his main point: "All these were unceasingly active." Other than sound, the extended metaphor of the weaving process, along with the accumulation of epic-like epithets (ground-vine tendrils, message-carrying air) and similes (green as mosses of the Icy Glen), gives a poetic and philosophic unity to the scene.

One further example to establish Moby-Dick as a "poem" is Padraic Colum's discovery of a footnote in free verse. In trying to describe the whiteness of the hunted whale, Melville in his deliberate, unhurried way reflects on objects which might give some idea of the elusive quality of whiteness. He chances upon the albatross and

relegates his retrospective description to footnote position. Colum finds it a clear sample of the poet's free verse and prints it in poetic lines.[6]

> I remember the first Albatross I ever saw. It
> was during a prolonged gale in waters hard
> upon the Antarctic seas.
> From my forenoon watch below, I ascended to the
> overclouded deck; and there, dashed
> upon the main hatches I saw
> A regal, feathery thing of unspotted whiteness,
> and with a hooked, Roman bill sublime.
> At intervals
> It arched forth its vast archangel wings, as if to
> embrace some holy ark. Wondrous flut-
> terings and throbbings shook it.
> Thou bodily unharmed, it uttered cries, as some
> king's ghost in supernatural distress.
> Through its inexpressive, strange eyes,
> Methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God. (187)

From the first sentence we might expect an ensuing prose account, but again the inverted word order (waters hard, bill sublime), the rhythmical units as "regal, feathery thing" and the archaic "methought" suggest that Melville goes further than a mere factual report. Colum's interpretation enhances the cadence of the free verse--the measured rhythmical movement of the albatross and the poet's eye.

With these qualities Moby-Dick may conceivably be considered a poem, and Melville's use of epic images in his poetry achieves the elevated style requisite to the form. In this metaphoric passage Melville recalls the epic figure of metaphor, simile and personification:

> For, as when the red-checked, dancing girls,
> April and May, trip home to the wintry, mis-
> anthropic woods; even the barest, ruggedest,
> most thundercloven old oak will at least
> send forth some few green sprouts, to welcome

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[6]Colum, p. 18.

such glad-hearted visitants; so Ahab did, in
the end, a little respond to the playful
allurings of that girlish air. (122)

In yet another epical image, Melville says of the sea at sunset:

Yonder, by the ever-brimming goblet's rim,
the warm waves blush like wine. (165)

Here are apparently intentional echoes of Homer's stock "rosy-fingered dawn" and "wine-dark sea."

Since the burden of proving The Lusiad a long narrative poem is not upon us, we turn to illustrations of Camoëns' elevated style, perhaps the most outstanding single characteristic of his epic. The Renaissance poet, like Homer, and like Melville, finds a poetic fervor in describing nature in these word pictures of the sun and moon:

Now shooting o'er the flood his fervid blaze
The red brow'd sun withdraws his beamy rays (I, 24)

The purple curtains of the morn she [Aurora] draws (I, 25)

The moon, full orb'd forsakes her watery cave,
And lifts her lovely head above the wave. . .

Around her, glittering on the heaven's arched brow,
Unnumber'd stars, enclosed in azure, glow,
Thick as the dew-drops of the April dawn,
Or May-flowers crowding o'er the daily-lawn (I,25)

The abundance of epithets in The Lusiad recalls that quality of the authentic epic, for he praises da Gama as:

Illustrious Gama, whom the waves obey'd (I,4)

. . .dauntless Gama. . . (VII,227)

. . .brave Gama. . . (II,45)

. . .daring Gama. . . (I, 10)

Camoëns wrote his poem of rhymed octave stanzas in heroic iambic, and his elevated style, transmitted through the heroic couplets of William Julius Mickle, which Melville knew, suggests his epical mastery of poetic style. Perhaps he was a recipient of the poetic gift of the Muse just as he declares:

> I feel, I feel the mighty power infuse,
> And bathe my spirit in Aonian dews! (III,2)

The Handbook epic formula requires "characters of high position" and a "central figure of heroic proportions" in the make-up of the epic form. This particular requirement hints that this description is directed toward, or is based upon, the original or authentic epic in which the hero was conventionally a king or a ruler. In the literary epic the heroic figure is not necessarily high born, but his being necessarily extraordinary in some way lends unity and substance to the epic story.

The characters in Moby-Dick are probably not individuals Melville knew but, more likely, are composites of men. At any rate they are conceivable figures; they are possible men, but they are also fabulous, or legendary in a sense. Colum explains that Melville's characters are generalized like the characters of an epic and, as he sees them, "Ahab" and "Ishmael" are names that suggest a further significance than of personal characteristics.[7] The biblical Ishmael was the son of Abraham (Abram at the time) and Hagar, the maid of Abraham's wife Sarah (Sarai). After Isaac was born to Abraham and

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[7]Colum, p. 17.

Sarah, she dismissed her maid-servant and her child, casting them out to wander in the wilderness. Genesis 16:11-12 explains the name ("God shall hear") and describes the child to be born of Hagar:

> Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the Lord has given heed in your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen. (KJV)

From this wild, outcast figure Melville took the name of his initial narrator and begins his parable, "Call me Ishmael."

Like the name Ishmael, that of Ahab is a biblical borrowing and, also like Ishmael, Ahab was an uncommon name with the early New Englanders. Melville's model was the seventh king of Israel after the division of the kingdom, and the Bible records:

> And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all that were before him. (I Kings 16:30)

That Melville drew his maniac captain from King Ahab is evinced in Peleg and Ishmael's conversation in Chapter XVI:

> . . .he's Ahab, boy; and Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king!
> And a very vile one. When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood? (79)

Elijah the Tishbite warned Ahab three times of his destiny when the dogs would lick his blood, and Elijah is the name of the old man on the dock who twice warns Captain Ahab's crewmen against embarking on the fatal Pequod.

Although the characters of Moby-Dick are not drawn from the biblical

figures, their names, like those of other epic characters, are important because they give a clue to the accomplishments and destiny of the characters. The epic attempts to define the relations between the hero's name, his life and his death.[8] Melville employs names drawn from the early times of man's history which impart the tone or attitude necessary to the understanding of his epic figures, but he molds them from his own sense of values. For example, Ishmael suggests Melville's concern with the problem of alienation and of discord between the individual and his community. Ishmael, as an outcast, is not bound by conformity but is a "free" individual, and it is through his eyes that Melville narrates much of the story, perhaps because of his freedom or mobility in the narrative structure. Ishmael first appears as an outcast and concludes the voyage, still a man alone, an orphan afloat on a coffin, awaiting rescue in the open sea. Melville leaves many elements of his story unreconciled because that is the way he finds the world.

Ahab's name mainly suggests an inherent evil, for he is a man of extremes. Matthiessen suggests that a concentrated view of Ahab reveals that he was born from the matrix of Melville's age; "he is an embodiment of his author's most profound response to the problem of free will in extremis."[9] There is a robust forcefulness about Melville's epic hero figure; he is of heroic proportions in the bare essence of the character he reveals, primal and promethean, if wicked

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[8]Thomas Greene, The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity (New Haven, 1963), p. 16.

[9]Matthiessen, p. 447.

and extreme. Ahab must be classified as a heroic rebel. The epic includes "one figure in whom the whole virtue, and perhaps the whole failure, of living seems superhumanly concentrated,"[10] Abercrombie declares. As an exemplary failure of balance of human will, Ahab is heroic.

Camoëns' epic hero is a real explorer on a real voyage which the poet garnishes with mythological narrative structure. The fact that Vasco da Gama actually did live and make such a voyage gives a slight ironic touch to Camoëns' treatment of the epic character in relation to that of Melville, for Ahab seems much more real in the reader's experience than da Gama. Da Gama is portrayed as a rather faceless, shadowy or indistinct figure. For Camoëns' purpose, he <u>is</u> indistinct, but he is so because his personal characteristics are not of prime concern. His venture is the significant thing, for he is representative of the Portuguese nation in his immediate exploration and of mankind in a larger sense. Camoëns' character, then, is not so fully depicted as that of Melville, for the Renaissance poet is concerned with the act and the results, whereas the American writer concerns himself primarily with the action and its motivation.

Typical descriptions of the epic call for it further to be composed of a "series of adventures" or "episodes important to the history of a nation or race" and require that the relationship of these episodes to each other, to the epic hero and to the central action,

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[10]Lascelles Abercrombie, <u>The Epic</u> (London, 1914?), p. 50.

form an organic whole. The framework of the organic whole in both of the epics is provided by the central action of the voyage--a search in both cases. Both heroes command their respective ships and have a single-minded purpose. The numerous dramatic episodes may seem digressions to the overly realistic reader, but structurally each action contributes to the final exertion and to the overall purpose of the epic form. Each event is a complete action in miniature and serves as a metaphor embodying a suggestion of the entire epic image. For example, in each of the gams of the Pequod Melville offers a fragmentary suggestion of his philosophy in the whole epic. The gams, as James Dean Young interprets them, demonstrate the Pequod's inevitable relations to the world.[11] The ship is self-sufficient, isolated from land and communication, dominated by Ahab, and set on the course determined by his obsession. Melville says whaling ships are sociable, but in the meeting of the Albatross there is no exchange, for as the other captain tries to speak through his trumpet, it falls into the water--a sign, according to Young, of the problem of communication.[12] Then the Pequod is alone again--separated and apart. The confrontation with the Albatross serves as an evil omen; the ship is described as "bleached like the skeleton of a stranded walrus," (234) and his first of several gams serves with the others in preparing for Ahab's final confrontation when the means of communication are fury and violence. Melville's epic story then is of an action important not only to the

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[11]"The Nine Gams of the Pequod," American Literature, XXV (1954) 449.

[12]Ibid., p. 451.

history of a nation or a race but to the history of mankind, for he depicts a chase of an allegorical "demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts." (236)

Camoëns, for the most part, traces the route of da Gama's original voyage, adding spirited attacks, misfortunes and storms when he deems it fitting for epic proportion and narrative interest. One primary purpose in several of the episodes, or apparent digressions, in The Lusiad is Camoëns' intention to relate the history of his nation. When the king of Melinde comes aboard the Portuguese vessel and is lavishly entertained, he is told the outline of the history of Portugal. After the discovery of a maritime road to India, the fleet, heading homeward, is brought by Venus to her "Isle of Joy" where she entertains them, and they hear a siren sing a prophecy of all that will happen to their country between that time and Camoëns' day. The poet skillfully employs the mythological machinery for effects he could not achieve without the supernatural, and in the scene at Venus' Isle he not only relates the future history but suggests here too the powers--natural and supernatural--which are beyond man. While Camoëns believes man is ruled by a divine plan, for narrative facility he inserts a whole pagan structure between his hero and his God.[13] E. M. W. Tillyard says, regarding the importance of the whole, ". . . The Lusiad speaks for more

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[13]Frank Pierce, "The Place of Mythology in The Lusiad," Comparative Literature, VI (Spring 1954), 97.

than a single small nation. It is the one worthy poetic record of the expansive spirit of the whole of western Europe. . ."[14]

It may be said then that Melville and Camoëns, through their elevated style presented characters of heroic proportions in a series of adventures important to the history of their nations, race, and man. Bowra invokes an analysis of further epic characteristics when he says the epic is

> A narrative of some length and deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance and come from a life of action, especially violent action such as war.[15]

The whaling industry as a whole, and the whale hunt of Moby-Dick especially, provide for an overwhelming enterprise, suggesting super-human qualities. The sea journey of Ahab and his crew is congruent with Paul Goodman's theory that a real voyage or an allegorical voyage may be an epical action.[16] The basic action of The Lusiad is a real and historical voyage, while in Moby-Dick, though the ultimate physical disaster is based on an actual happening, the voyage as presented by Melville, is an allegorical journey. The men on the whaling vessel are elevated to the legendary level of a life reminiscent of heroic explorers venturing into danger more terrific than ordinary man knows. The former seafarer-novelist glorifies the whale hunters in Chapter XXIV, "The

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[14]E. M. W. Tillyard, The English Epic and Its Background (New York, 1954), p. 249.

[15]Bowra, p. 1.

[16]"Epical Actions," Perspectives on Epic, eds. Frederick H. Candelaria and William C. Strange (Boston, 1965), p. 121.

Advocate," by describing their accomplishments:

> . . .so remarkable in themselves, and so continuously momentous in their sequential issues, that whaling may well be regarded as that Egyptian mother, who bore offspring themselves pregnant from her womb. (107)

Melville takes great effort to insure that his heroes of the sea are properly revered:

> All that is made such a flourish of in the old South Sea Voyages, those things were but the life-time commonplaces of our heroic Nantucketeers. (108)

Whaling is essential to commerce and thus to the entire economy of the world; whaling has definite "aesthetically noble associations" upon which point Melville is willing to do battle, and, further, it is an utterly respectable occupation. In addition to these qualities Melville declares:

> The dignity of our calling the very heavens attest. Cetus is a constellation of the South! (110)

In their epical actions the two writers pit their heroes against nature; the heroic life rules the scene, and man is a solitary figure against a background of God's essential creation where life is a hand-to-hand affair. Melville stresses the elemental nature of their existence and conflicts on the sea:

> For what are the comprehensible terrors of man compared with the interlinked terrors and wonders of God! (107)

At the outset of his epic Camoëns invokes the Muse to grant him the poetic power to deal with the greatness of the Lusian heroes as they

> With prowess more than human forc'd their way
> To the fair kingdoms of the rising day (I,2)

The countrymen of whom he sings are greater than heroes that past bards may have lauded:

> A nobler hero's deeds demand my lays
> Than e'er adorned the song of ancient days (I,4)

Not only greater than past heroes but the honor they gain grants future fame to them and glory to the nation:

> Illustrious names, with deathless laurels crown'd,
> While time rolls on in every clime renown'd (I,4)

Grandeur and importance are granted the two epics by the very background of the action--the vastness of the sea and the unknown potential perils of sea enterprise. The heroic life rules the scene, and the scene is that of primitive and essential life in its setting of nature.

Bowra places a significant focus upon violence in the epic which conventionally occurs in man's struggle against the elements of nature or some natural phenomenon and which is always a violence in which the hero's moral and mental strength is tested as well as his physical prowess. The characteristic epic violence lends to the complexity of action, to the interlacing of conflicting energies and may be a by-product of obstacles the hero must overcome before reaching his goal as in the case of da Gama whose fleet is attacked by hostile islanders, battered by raging storms, and confronted by supernatural spirits. The violence, on the other hand, may be inherent in the achievement of the hero's purpose as the goal of Ahab, finding the white whale, inevitably involves a fatal encounter.

One further concept of the epic form is the contibution of a

contemporary of Luis de Camoëns, the Italian critic Minturno[17] whose Arte Poetica, published in 1587, deals with the Renaissance concept of poetry. Joel E. Spingarn sees Minturno's definition of an epic as a modification or paraphrase of Aristotle's view of tragedy and cites the critic's concept of the epic:

> The imitation of a grave and noble deed, perfect, complete, and of proper magnitude with embellished language, at times merely narrating and at others introducing persons in words and actions in order that through pity and fear of the things imitated such passions may be purged from the mind with both pleasure and profit.[18]

Because he was both a contemporary of Camoëns and a student of Aristotle, Minturno grants a time link to our study. Elucidating the requirements of subject, style and purpose in epic narrative, he defines the epic as he considered it in his own time, and his definition is a precise reference to the classical Greek concept. It is generally agreed that epic writers rely heavily on classical form and style, and Melville's reliance has been indicated. Thus in an attempt to show particular parallels between Melville and Camoëns, Minturno's epic definition provides an interesting bridge between the classical and Renaissance concepts.

In line with Minturno's description of the epic form, The Lusiad

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[17]Minturno is considered one of the four most prominent critics of his century by Bernard Weinberg (History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance, p. 66), and his view of the epic serves to give us a just view of sixteenth-century epic.

[18]A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York, 1899), p. 31.

and Moby-Dick have been illustrated as depicting grave and noble deeds upon the seas. Melville's narrative, however, denies application of the words "complete" and "perfect," but such a denial seems to reaffirm rather than negate its epical qualities. To be complete is to have an end; to be perfect is to allow no further amendment. Indicative of the epic novel's open-endedness is the voluminous and diverse critical interpretation since the book's publication. Melville allowed room for generations to ply through his imitation, to dive, to sieve, and to find themselves reflected in the sea he sailed. Such was his "largeness and stir," and it becomes a strength in his knowledge and declaration:

> . . .small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught--nay, but the draught of a draught. (142)

This suggests too the vastness of his "proper magnitude," for his coarse and rough-hewn material is exalted by grandiose manner and form. Melville illustrates the magnitude in his figurative request:

> Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! (452)

The scope of Camoëns' epic quite nearly speaks for itself in his utilization of myth and history, anchored by a more recent venture. He records the national history from its beginnings and makes it an epical heritage for Portuguese posterity. Perhaps both epics may be said to be complete in their excellence, but neither is final; neither is whole or perfect unto itself, for each demands an extraneous response to the epic spirit in which it was conceived.

Minturno stipulates that epic is partly narration and partly direct action. To carry the burden of the narration Melville originally drafted Ishmael, and, through the first chapters, the former schoolmaster is the source of exposition and atmospheric background. Melville introduces Ishmael as a folksy character of Yankee humor and makes of him an honest, amiable and appealing figure with whom the reader can identify. Since it is believed[19] that Melville changed the structure, or re-plotted the narrative of Moby-Dick after beginning the Ishmael story, we might feasibly assume that he began the novel in the way of the folk epic in which he planned to draw upon the life and lore of the Nantucketeers. His change of direction led, though, to a more formal epic form, or art epic, in which he could take more liberties with the popular material he was treating and in which he could highly idealize the dramatic action. This extended freedom and idealization is indicated in the progression of the drama, for, after chapter XXIII, Ishmael no longer serves as the primary narrative vehicle, but the reader is transported into a larger world, or is granted a broader view, through the viewpoint of omniscient narration rather than of the one character.

On the whole, there is more narration in Moby-Dick than direct action, for Melville gives an in-depth view of the men, the whaling venture and life aboard the Pequod in order to lay a foundation for the final catastrophe. The flashback element in The Lusiad is reminiscent of the Homeric and Virgilian epics, and, through this flashback, much

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[19]George R. Stewart, "The Two Moby-Dicks," American Literature XXV (1954), 417-448.

of Camoëns' story also is narration as da Gama recounts to the king their adventures on the sea.

Though not considered narration per se, the cetology chapters of Melville represent, to some extent, the catalogue element of the ancient epic. His objective is clearly set forth:

> My object here is simply to project the draught of a systematization of cetology. (131)

From that point Melville proceeds with his documentation by dividing all species of whales into three main classes, or Books, which are then subdivided into chapters in order to give a naturalistic and metaphorical account of the kinds of whales in relation to each other.

Awe-inspiring realism permeates both epics and provides the means for the purging or cathartic effect of Minturno's formula. Melville and Camoëns adroitly wield historic truth and detail as a unifying and clarifying tool. They knew, as Greene declares, "At the heart of the epic is tangible reality, swiftly apprehended, simple with the simplicity of violence and wonder."[20] Descriptions of the tumultous sea, warring encounters, life before the mast and nautical exploration, whether for whales or a sea route, leave no question of the writers having had the experience. Melville summons his narrative power in describing the action between Stubb and the whale:

> From the vibrating line extending the entire length of the upper part of the boat, and from its now being more tight than a harpstring, you would have thought the craft had two keels--one cleaving the water, the other the air--as the

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[20]Greene, p. 16.

> boat churned on through both opposing elements at once. A continual cascade played at the bows; a ceaseless whirling eddy in her wake; and, at the slightest motion from within, even but of a little finger, the vibrating, cracking craft canted over her spasmodic gunwale into the sea. (284-85)

Realism is the vehicle of both stories, told with intensity, directness and natural vigor which suggests an actual event or sequence and yet with no less attention to imaginative flourish and poetic power.

The cathartic response evoked by Moby-Dick is attested to by an Atlas review which points out "a strange effect upon the reader's mind,"[21] and by D. H. Lawrence who says, "the book commands a stillness in the soul."[22] Melville creates in the reader a sense of fatigue and futility in the three chase chapters--the first two ending with Ahab simply awaiting dawn to continue his battle. Part of the feeling comes from the inevitably of doom, for Ahab will not be dissuaded and has declared, "This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled." (554) As a soul in isolation yet a part of the timeless order of things, Ahab hastens to his destiny. Melville evokes a sensation of the finiteness of man against evil or against vengeful nature when he describes the wrathful whale:

> Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal men could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled. (564-65)

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[21]Quoted by Luther S. Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent in "Introduction," Moby Dick by Herman Melville (New York, 1951), p. xix.

[22]Studies in Classic American Literature (New York, 1923), p. 216.

Melville evokes an empathic response in his images and in his whole drama. Camoëns, too, creates a certain identifying passion but primarily in his images rather than by the whole action. Of a battle scene in Calicut he says:

> The smoke rolls wide, and sudden bursts the roar,
> The lifted waves fall trembling, deep the shore
> Groans; quick and quicker blaze embraces blaze
> In flashing arms; louder the thunders raise
> Their roaring. . .
> When piercing sudden through the dreadful roar
> The yelling shrieks of thousands strike the shore.
> (IX,364)

At the sailing of da Gama and his crew the families stand by with no optimism about the fate of the men:

> Such the lorn parents' and the spouses' woes,
> Such o'er the strand the voice of wailing rose;
> From breast to breast the soft contagion crept;
> Moved by the woeful sound the children wept
> (IX,101)

By such passages Camoëns creates a picture in words and evokes a poignant response from his reader, but the story in its entirety seems removed from reality; couched in mythological detail, it does not bring about a sufficiently personal identification for such a response as Minturno's words suggest. The substance of the epic is real in both epics and because, as Abercrombie asserts, the prime material must not be invented but rather the reader must be able to rely on the reality of the epic's substance,[23] then Camoëns and Melville rely on history to attest to their sense of truth. As the actual events in man's

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[23]Abercrombie, p. 51.

history surpass what his imagination alone can conceive, so the epic writers dip again into the reservoir of past history for worthy epical matter.

From the illustrative descriptions applied to the two epics, we find the works of Melville and Camoëns are similar in subject, style and epic form. They exhibit a kinship too in the essential spirit or purpose of the epic. The purpose of the literary epic, as Bowra sees it, is to find and set forth the significant achievements of man and to show him in his essential nobility[24] or, in some instances, in his extreme depravity. In the time of Camoëns and in the time of which he wrote, the world was largely unknown territory, its lands unexplored, its resources untapped. To venture into new lands, to search for new routes and improvements in living was to push man another step in his dominion over nature. Of such a venture is the story Camoëns tells, but, even as da Gama expands man's knowledge of his world, Camoëns expands his work into an idealized voyage in which da Gama represents his countrymen and even all men crossing the horizon into the unknown which life holds. He reveals the truth not merely of a voyage, but of man's life on earth "such as it is when poetry presents it most nobly, most feelingly and without a veil."[25]

Camoëns and Melville as epic writers attempt to present man his essence, an elemental and primal figure in God's creation and to

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[24]Bowra, p. 13.

[25]Woodberry, p. 77.

display his energies and his foibles between the reality of events and the ideality of background and detail, between what man is and what he wills to be. Melville's Ahab becomes, not a conventional noble figure, but the exemplar of the dangers of extreme willfulness. Ahab cannot be reconciled with evil in the world but attempts to overcome and destroy it by himself. Melville's theme, presented negatively in the depraved Ahab, is a reconciliation of the extremes in man's nature. Da Gama is the noble figure who sets sail for the betterment of mankind, for the glory of his homeland, and who returns home a victor in his exploration, having sown the seeds of Christianity. Ahab is a missionary of evil who sets out in vengeance, seeking evil, motivated by the insanity it has aroused in him. In da Gama the nation and race are awakened to self-consciousness, but Ahab is destroyed in his fiendish drive for the white whale without recognition of his true self. The epics are examples of what the epic writer aspires to do: "to pierce the surface of things to their real and abiding significance, to explain the duty and magnificence of man, and to create works of art which should take note of all that is most important in the world."[26] The common epic purpose of Melville and Camoëns, brought into focus and fulfilled by the elements of subject matter, form and style, is serious, moral and instructive in its call to man to recognize, meet and value his destiny.

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[26]Bowra, p. 14.

Such a comparison leads now to a look at the more direct and specific examples of Camoëns' influence on Melville. The following chapter is an observation of textual influence and similarities in the times and spirits of Melville and Camoëns.

CHAPTER IV

COMPARISON OF THE TEXTS AND THE TIMES

In further analysis of the nineteenth-century novel and the sixteenth-century poem, several textual parallels are evident, if not in such a way as to suggest a direct paraphrase or borrowing, still in such a way as to suggest the American's awareness of the mind and manner of the Portuguese poet. Both epics tell the story of a voyage--a search in both cases--an exploration and a chase respectively. The central figure in each of the epics is the commander of the sailing vessel and both ships, traveling around the Cape of Good Hope, fall victim to violent storms and strange apparitions. Melville's allegorical journey around the Cape seems especially influenced by Camoëns' elaborate description of the water-spout encountered there by da Gama's fleet. In an explanatory note (V,115) Mickle observes that ancients explained the water spouts as sulphurous vapors of the air, which, agitated by the wind and water of the storm, take on a fire-like glow as the humidity subsides. Camoëns alludes to this phenomenon of nature:

> . . .midst the horrors of the tempest plays,
> And on the blast's dark wings will gaily blaze;
> These eyes distinct have seen that living fire
> Glide through the storm, and round my sails aspire
> And oft, while wonder, thrill'd my breath, mine eyes
> To heaven have seen the watery columns rise.
> Thick as a mast the vapour swells its size
> A curling whirlwind lifts it to the skies (V,116)

Melville employs Camoëns' spout image and describes it:

> Lit up by the moon, it looked celestial; seemed some plumed and glittering god uprising from the sea (230)

The mysterious apparition would appear momentarily, vanish, and then reappear the next night or several nights later. Such a will-o-the-wisp kind of vision it was that Melville declares their wonder and incredulity over the apparition "as if it had never been." (231) Camoëns' epic crewmen, also incredulous, "esteem the phantom of the dreamful brain." (V,115) Melville and Camoëns depict the sailors as mystified at the unusual sight, unsure of whether to trust their senses or to consider it a trick of the imagination. Both employ the image as an example of the fine line of distinction between the real and the unreal, and it serves symbolically to represent the nebulous, misty, unknown world of the sea. Man is frightened by the unfamiliar, and it is significant that neither writer offers a scientific explanation in the text but rather draws upon the strangeness and apparent inexplicability of the apparition to suggest the foreign atmosphere of the sea--the alienation of man outside his own element.

Both sailors emphasize the silver quality of the spout, for Melville recalls that "waves rolled by like scrolls of silver," (232) and "made what seemed a silvery silence," (232) and the mist was a "silvery jet." (232) Camoëns has da Gama remember that it "filled her [the ship's] shining horns with silver light." (V,118) Both attest to its quality of singleness. In Moby-Dick the vision is of a "solitary jet;" (232) in The Lusiad the jet "kindled in one wide

flame." (V,115)

The hovering clouds, roaring thunder and surging sea evoked the fiery phantom, which in turn, evoked a fear of the supernatural and a sense of wonder at its meaning in the respective crews. Melville records the sense of "immemorial superstition of their race," (232) and their regard of the "prenaturalness" (232) and "peculiar dread at this flitting apparition," (232) for some "thought there lurked a devilish charm." (232) The Pequod's objective is a "vengeful errand"--of malicious motive, of perverted purpose, and the religious connotation strikes a note of irony when, after Fedallah's cry, "There she blows!", Melville observes:

> Had the trumpet of judgment blown, they could not have quivered more (231)

Ahab's crew was so preoccupied with the evil supernatural powers of the white whale and with their involuntary participation in Ahab's demonic vow, that everything fearful seemed to originate with the great white adversary. They believed:

> . . . that unnearable spout was cast by one self-same whale; and that whale, Moby Dick (232)

On the other hand, da Gama's Christian crew deems the vision a divine sign; their fear is an awesome wonder rather than the moral uneasiness implied in the whaling crew:

> That living fire, by seamen held divine,
> Of heaven's own care in storms the holy sign (V,115)

The two works afford yet another suggestion of influence in

the depiction of their respective myths--colossal, formidable, menacing creatures of the sea. Camoëns' Adamastor, a vicious monster, who threatens to destroy the explorers and even their entire nation, symbolizes the dangers of the unknown waters and the revenge of the elements. The robust giant embodies the power of nature with which da Gama must come to terms. In Billy Budd Melville equates Camoëns' prodigious figure with the overwhelming, revolutionary ideas which frightened Europe in the eighteenth century. In light of Melville's awareness of the Portuguese poet's insidious beast, it might be said that Moby Dick symbolizes vengeful nature, retaliating against Ahab's aggression and will to dominate. The white whale embodies the nature-power, or the power of evil in nature with which Ahab must come to terms. Melville's whale description evinces several instances in which he employs imagery much like that of Camoëns in describing his Adamastor. The white whale was a "hump like a snow-hill. . . a high sparkling hump." (538) The Adamastor, a fictive monster of gigantic proportions, had characteristics much like Moby Dick:

> . . .when rising through the darken'd air
> Appall'd we saw a hideous Phantom flare;
> High and enormous o'er the flood he towered,
> . . .An earthy paleness o'er his cheeks was spread (V,125)

Camoëns depicts a "hideous phantom," and Melville repeatedly uses the word to describe the whale, such as "demon phantom" (236). The Adamastor appeared with "revenge and horror in his mien combined;" (V,125) while "malicious intelligence" (541) is ascribed to the whale. The foe of the Portuguese explorers was characterized by "gnashing teeth's blue rows;" (V,125) Ahab's adversary had "long crooked rows

of white glistening teeth" (540) with "bluish pearl-white. . . [in] the inside of the jaw." (541)

Perhaps the relevant passage bearing the most striking similarity is that of the yawning tomb image. The Leviathan's "glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb" (541) and the vocal Adamastor declares the hero will "prepare his yawning tomb." (V,129)

Both mythic creatures are awe-inspiring spectres and both have what Clark terms, in reference to the Adamastor, a pedigree and a romance.[1] The monster, transformed into the Cape of Storms, was of the race of giants that declared war on Jove; he suffered the metamorphosis as a punishment for his unfaithfulness in love.[2] The white whale was also a legend in its own way. True accounts of deadly encounters between ships and the whale had been inflamed by wild rumors so that Moby Dick had become a legend of the seas and the subject of superstition among whaling crewmen.

> . . .it cannot be much matter of surprise that some whalemen should go still further in their superstitions; declaring Moby Dick not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time); that though groves of spears should be planted in his flanks, he would still swim away unharmed. . . (179)

In the "Spirit-Spout" chapter Melville comments on the name of Cape around which they pass such a fitful journey:

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[1]John Clark, A History of Epic Poetry (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 310.

[2]Ibid.

> Cape of Good Hope, do they call ye? Rather
> Cape Tormentoto, as called of yore; for
> long allured by the perfidious silences that
> before us, we found ourselves launched into
> the tormented sea. . . (233)

Camoëns' phrase for the Cape in The Lusiad was Cabo Tormentório (V,50,65; X,37) which Mickle consistently translates as "the Cape of Tempests." Melville must have had Camoëns' appelation in mind as well as perhaps Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes (London, 1625) which recounts that Bartholomew Diaz "first discovered the famous Cape, which for his manifold troubles he termed Cabo Tormentoso, or the tempestuous Cape. . ." (Part 1, Book 2, Chap. 1, Sec. 3). Mansfield and Vincent surmise that Melville's erroneous third t probably came from his misreading the elongated s in some chronicle printed in the old style.[3] At any rate, Camoëns' designation of the infamous Cape in Mickle's translation seemed to serve Melville's narrative purpose in his own commentary.

Yet another instance of Melville's debt of plot to The Lusiad is noted in the fact that the first part of Moby-Dick distinctly specifies that the course of the voyage will take them around Cape Horn (cf. pp. 50, 72, 77, 70). In Chapter XXVIII the Pequod is mentioned as running southward--a probable indication, George Stewart notes, that Cape Horn is still in Melville's mind.[4] In Chapter

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[3]Mansfield and Vincent, "Explanatory Notes," p. 738.

[4]Stewart, p. 421.

XLIV Melville offers a reason for the change in course by explaining that from where reports of the whale note his position, the Pequod might have a better chance of finding him to change their direction. Stewart comments that this is not a sufficient explanation for the original deception of the reader.[5] A further explanation may be that Melville found, as his story grew to epic proportions, that the Cape of Good Hope and its legend lent itself better to his own violent drama so that he followed Camoëns example in the course of the Pequod's venturous voyage.

In Book IV da Gama tells of "a reverend figure" who, on the day of the ship's sailing, stood on the "lofty decks" crying out warnings of the dangers of their project. He believed the exploration to be a foolhardy plan undertaken for the single purpose of personal and national honor. Enumerating the follies of their voyage, he declares:

> What stings, what plagues, what secret scourges curst,
> Torment those bosoms where thy pride is nurst! (IV,103)

The old man is concerned about their souls and believes the men to be defying God and reason in carrying out such a woeful conquest:

> Through all these regions, all these cities, scorn'd
> Is thy religion, and thine altars spurn'd (IV,103)

Melville's Elijah seems uniquely dependent on Camoëns' "reverend figure," for he is decidedly more like the old man on the dock than like the biblical prophet. Before embarking on the Pequod, Ishmael

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[5]Stewart, p. 421.

and Queequeg meet the old man Elijah who, in an attempt to warn them against the monomaniac Ahab, questions their plan to sail on the ill-fated whaling vessel. Upon being told they had just signed the articles, he inquires, "Anything down there about your souls?" (91) Elijah, like the Old Man of Belem, shows concern in the spiritual destiny of the sailors. The old man warns da Gama's men to return to their faith in God instead of faith in their own vain ambitions. Such is the theme of Father Mapple's sermon in Moby-Dick as he preaches from the text of Jonah and the whale. Jonah tried to escape the will of God and was devoured by the whale. From this, Father Mapple teaches that God will not be scorned; man must obey the command of God and disobey the evil welling up in his own will.

> And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves:
> and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein
> the hardness of obeying God consists. (41)

It is inevitable hubris against which the seafarer-preacher sermonizes, and the same pride, willfulness and vanity spur the old man to admonish da Gama's crewmen:

> Oh! Madness of ambition. . .
> That fame's vain flattery may thy name adorn. (IV,104)

Melville later echoes this philosophy in his explanation of the ship's hierarchy:

> There's the vanity of glory; there's the insanity
> of life! (148)

Mansfield and Vincent point out several textual similarities in the works of Melville and Camoëns. For example, Melville says:

> . . .Salem, where they tell me the young girls breathe

> such musk, their sailor sweethearts smell them miles
> off shore, as though they were drawing nigh the
> odorous Moluccas instead of the Puritanic sands. (33)

The passage is suggestive of Camoëns' description:

> Now found their steps the bless'd Arabia spreads
> Her groves of odour, and her balmy meads,
> And every breast, inspired with glee, inhales
> The grateful fragrance of Sabal's gales. (IV,92)

Further he says:

> The clove, whose odour on the breathing gale
> Far to the sea Malucco's plains exhale. (IX,372)

Another textual relationship arises in Melville's description in the chapter "The Doubloon" in which he characterizes the shiny coin:

> . . .of purest, virgin gold, raked somewhere out
> of the heart of gorgeous hills, whence, east and
> west, over golden sands, the head-waters of many
> a Pactolus flows. (427)

According to the notes of Mansfield and Vincent, the Pactolus is a historical river mentioned by Herodotus and Ovid and, as the legend goes, became golden when Midas washed himself in it.[6] The editors indicate the likeness, however, of Camoëns' words on the river Pactolus:

> If empire tempt ye; lost the east expands,
> Fair and immense, her summer-garden lands;
> Their boastful wealthy displays her radiant store;
> Pactol and Hermus' streams o'er golden ore
> Roll their long way; but not for you they flow;
> Their treasures blaze on the stern soldan's brow.
> (VII,198)

It is significant that Melville's Pequod sails on Christmas Day; the date of Jesus' birth and thus new life for the Christian world is

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[6]Mansfield and Vincent,"Explanatory Notes", p. 803.

also the date of birth of a new voyage--a new life--for Ishmael and the Pequod crew. If the weather serves as an indicator there is little promise of victory and redemption:

> It was a short, cold Christmas. . . we found ourselves
> almost broad upon the wintry ocean, whose freezing
> spray cased us in ice, as in polished armor. (102)

Melville further marks the initiation of the vessel:

> . . . the old craft dived into the green seas, and
> sent the shivering frost all over her. . . the cold,
> damp night breeze blew. . . the Pequod thrust her
> vindictive bows into the cold malicious waves. . .
> (102,104)

Da Gama tells of a Christmas experience characterized by hopelessness and bad weather:

> Now shined the sacred morn, when from the east
> Three kings the holy cradled babe addressed,
> And hail'd him Lord of heaven: (V,141)

> Wandering new seas, in gulphs unknown, forlorn,
> By labour weaken'd, and by famine worn;
> Our food corrupted, pregnant with disease,
> And pestilence on each expected breeze;
> Not even a gleam of hope's delusive ray
> To lead us onward through the devious way. (V,142)

> . . . the salt waves our gliding prows receive;
> Here to the left, between the bending shores,
> Torn by the winds the whirling billow roars,
> And boiling raves against the founding coast,
> . . . Aslant against the wind our vessels roll:
> Far from the land, wide o'er the ocean driven (V,142)

Christmas Day, traditionally a joyous commemoration, becomes, in both epics, a day of despairing fearfulness and growing apprehension. This instance of similarity, along with others, bears witness to the probable influence of Camoëns' specific incidents and imagery on the sea story of Herman Melville.

Neither the story of da Gama nor that of Ahab is an archaic tale. Each is a work of its own time. The seed of The Lusiad had long been germinating in the mind of the poet who had always been fond of his native land and devoted to her heritage. In time he saw the beginnings of her ruin in unbridled imperialism and the chaos it wrought. The homeland to which he returned was plagued by religious intolerance and extraordinary profligacy; devaluation of money had increased poverty; peasants were seeking ways out of the feverish tumult of the country into other lands.[7] Camoëns "sadly faced the bitter fact that he had come home in the empty, chaotic years between his country's marvelous, brilliant past and her inevitable, hopeless future."[8] The country was ruled by a "pathologically fanatical" young king, and the government was overrun by greed and corruption; Portugal's entire political and social structure verged on destruction.[9] The patriot grieved over his country's ills, and, as he concluded his epic narrative, his own outlook overflowed in the final cantos, characterized by despair and pessimism. The irony of fate is that the poem was published five years prior to the catastrophe of Alcácer Kebir where the Portuguese army was defeated by the Moors of North Africa in a battle which took the life of the heirless king of Portugal, opening the way for Spanish rule. Camoëns discerned the rapid disintegration of the Portuguese state, and, with that undescribable saudade, the underlying sadness of the Portuguese

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[7]Hart, p. 184-85.

[8]Ibid., p. 185.

[9]Ibid., p. 187.

outlook on life, he aspired through his poetic work to arouse his countrymen from apathy to action.[10] The Lusiad begins with the spirited and eloquent review of the splendor of Portuguese achievement:

> What wars they wag'd, what seas, what dangers past,
> What glorious empire crown'd their toils at last,
> Vent'rous I sing, on soaring pinions borne,
> And all my country's wars the song adorn;
> What kings, what heroes of my native land
> Thunder'd on Asia's and Afric's strand (I,2,3)

Praise of the irrational king was purposefully included to smooth the rights of publication, but the hope is genuine:

> O born the pledge of happier days
> Our nation's safety, and our age's gem,
> O young Sebastian, hasten to the prime
> Of manly youth, to Fame's high temple climb. (I,5,8)

The epic ends, however, in somber meditation upon the incompetence of the king and the general degradation of the state. Certain passages are prophetic of the doom to occur later on the battlefields of North Africa:

> The humble soldier's blood, his only crime
> The amorous frailty of the youthful prime!
> The leader's rage, unworthy of the brave,
> Consigns the youthful soldier to the grave.
> Ah, stain to Lusian fame! (X,443)

In Camoëns' reflections there is a quiet and tender melancholy suggesting the passing of the Golden Age; the misfortune of which he speaks is as deeply personal as national:

> Yet thou, O goddess, hear,
> Yet let me live, though round my silver'd head
> Misfortune's bitterest rage unpitying shed
> Her coldest storms: (X,430)

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[10] Hart, p. 189.

Herman Melville shared the saudade of Camoëns and the profound concern for their respectively contemporary societies. His concern was a passionate but impersonal emotion, unappreciated by the nineteenth-century America. Indeed Melville so often and so openly stated his contempt for society and civilization that he was widely considered a misanthrope. In his copy of Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism he underlined the sentence, "When two or three are gathered together, the devil is among them."[11] The devil is the spokesman for the problem that burdened Melville most--the dilemma of evil, its origin, its meaning and final destiny. From the moral point of view, the valley of Typee and its idyllic life had represented, for Melville, a state of happy innocence with which civilization could not compare. Melville's skepticism was founded in his inability to reconcile evil in the world. He saw human experience and the moral world man provides for himself, even nature itself, as riven by irreconcilable contradictions.[12] He could neither believe, Hawthorne wrote, "nor be comfortable in his unbelief."[13]

Melville's attitudes alienated him from the progressive spirit of his era which was characterized by optimism in the prosperity and growth of America. Industrial expansion promised increasing wealth; resources in the West and immigration added to the population; railroads accelerated and facilitated commerce--it was an era of

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[11]Blankenship, p. 378.

[12]Richard Chase, "Herman Melville," Major Writers of America, ed. Perry Miller (New York, 1966), p. 493.

[13]Ibid.

advancement and hope. America needed assurance; Melville was skeptical. At a time when his countrymen were enthusiastically hailing the discovery of gold in California, patriotically approving the slogan of "Manifest Destiny" and cheerfully tuning their senses to the transcendental faith in abounding vitality and goodness in life, Melville's novel was pervaded by a melancholy surrender and resignation to what he seemed to consider a basic and triumphant evil in nature. His response was negative to the boundless commercial optimism of most Americans, with its "superficial and mean conception of the possibilities of human life, its denial of all the genuinely creative or heroic capacities of man, and its fear and dislike of any but the mildest truths."[14] Aileen Wells Parks contends that Moby-Dick is Melville's scathing indictment of the society he observed, and she labels the author as the "keenest observer, the most thoughtful commentator of his time, and the clearest prophet of those unhappy days that were to be."[15] She sees the story as a conflict between the individual and capitalism, and declares that Melville "foretold the doom of culture and of a civilization."[16] Although, in examples of specific allegorical allusions, Miss Parks mercilessly manipulates Melville's work to support her theory, his character, temperament and reactions to the times support her statements. F. O. Matthiessen maintains that Ahab's

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[14]Richard Chase. "Herman Melville," Major Writers, p. 494.

[15]Leviathan: Essay in Interpretation," Sewanee Review, XLVII (January-March 1939), p. 131.

[16]Ibid., p. 132.

> career is prophetic of many others in the history of later nineteenth-century America . . . Their drives were as relentless as his . . . The strong-willed individuals who seized the land and gutted the forests and built the railroads . . . tended to be as dead to enjoyment as he, as blind to everything but their one pursuit, as unmoved by fear or sympathy, as confident in assuming an identification of their wills with immutable plan or manifest destiny, as liable to regard other men as merely arms and legs for the fulfillment of their purposes, and finally as arid and exhausted in their burnt-out souls.[17]

Melville and Camoëns exhibit a similar pessimism in regard to the future of their particular societies, and both lived to see their tragic prophecies fulfilled--Camoëns in the Moorish crusade and Melville in the Civil War. The bitterness and sadness with which they viewed their world is one further tie to bind the two together and the two to all great epic bards, for Bowra explains that literary epic poets are characteristically melancholy and seemingly laden with responsibility as they comment on a momentous event or look ahead to a future state or occurrence.[18] The two authors, centuries and countries apart, lived in similar times, for they saw nationalism exerted to such an extent that its very foundations were torn asunder.

The propensity of the Renaissance period led Camoëns to the formal style of the literary epic with which to deal with his national story. Melville's years are included, too, in a period of Renaissance when, as the building of a new nation progressed, its literary power

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[17]Matthiessen, p. 459.

[18]Bowra, p. 23.

flourished. The epic form seems to lend itself to the profound materials of renewal, new life, of Renaissance eras. Melville's drama is a work of its own time in which he dramatizes the science of the sea and, as Richard Chase points out, ". . . he discovered that the legends, tall tales and folklore of whaling could be more than embellishments to his narrative; they could be for him what other bodies of folklore had been for Homer, Virgil or Camoëns--the materials of an epic."[19] The story is of Melville's time but is told in the pattern of the classic literary epic. "Moby-Dick does what every epic does: it absorbs the native materials of the popular imagination--such as the tall tales about the white whale--into a work of art, conceived on a grand scale."[20]

That the American writer knew the Portuguese poet's epic Melville himself asserts, and Newton Arvin insists that certainly Melville knew The Lusiad well; otherwise his own story would not have been the same epic he produced.[21] Melville must have become fond of the epic to which Jack Chase introduced him, for in the poet he found a kindred spirit--a man whose values in life and culture compared to his own, whose ship experiences recalled his sailing days, and whose passions ran as deeply and violently as those of Herman Melville. In addition to the common qualities they shared, there was a certain worldly abandon about Camoëns which

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[19]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, p. 96.

[20]Richard Chase, "Herman Melville," Major Writers, p. 492.

[21]Arvin, p. 149-50.

Melville must have admired and perhaps wished he could possess. Other than his South Sea ventures, which, as he depicts them in his works, are allegedly highly fictionalized, Melville's life was relatively unexciting. With the background of an austere and religious mother, an unstable father who died insane, and a relatively impoverished youth, Herman Melville was a suppressed, reticent and unaggressive individual with the exception, of course, of his expressive way with a pen. Even his embarking on his first whaling cruise was a negation of the life he knew rather than an affirmation of the venture itself. For all the profound struggles within him, there is no record of any notable outburst of emotion--no positive assertion of his personality. Yet, with all the vicarious action of his writings, we can assume a vast store of potential energy in the quiet New Yorker and can assume he read with approval of the fiery romances of Luis Camoëns, of his lack of inhibition in disagreeing with the courts, of his backstreet duels over political ties.

The epics of Camoëns and Melville are parallel in the literary epic form by definition and by example, in the similarities of action and description, in their timeliness and timelessness relative to their respective periods of history, and in the undulant but purposeful movement of the narrative patterns. Melville first became acquainted with The Lusiad in 1843[22] and, on the recommendation of his friend, Chase, he must have read it well, judging from his recurrent and

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[22]Howard, p. 74.

extensive references to the epic in his works. Luther S. Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent point out that Merton Sealts (Melville's Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed, no. 116) notes that Melville acquired in 1867 a copy of the Portuguese epic, with both English translation and the original text. We may safely assume from Melville's obvious knowledge of Camoëns' epic that he had access to The Lusiad prior to the writing of Moby-Dick. The 1867 acquisition was probably the complete works of Camoëns (see reference to sonnets of Camoëns on page 19) which Melville obtained through his interest in The Lusiad.

To attribute to chance the details and evidence set forth here is to place preposterous burden on the long arm of coincidence. Certainly Camoëns was not the main or perhaps even a major influence on Melville's writing, but such a comparative study demonstrates that Melville found in the sixteenth-century poet exemplary reconciliation of largeness of form and tenuity of matter and found too an extraordinary fullness, density of detail and spatial vastness, all of which he assimilated into his own work. In no other epic that he might have read could he have found so many qualities suitable to his own subject and talents. Thus, Melville, in his archaic genius, looked to the classical work of his Portuguese predecessor for an idea of form, language, and even the drama of scenic narrative, suggesting that man's literary achievements are diffused and thus immortalized and that it may be said of Camoëns and Melville as Bowra said of all epic writers: they "belong to a single chapter in the history of the human spirit."[23]

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[23]Bowra, p. 23.

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